



Commandant's NOTE

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THE ESSENCE OF INFANTRY

The Infantry exists for one purpose: "To close with the enemy by means of fire and maneuver to destroy or capture him, or to repel his assault by fire, close combat, and counterattack." The Infantryman's aggressive spirit both originates from the proving ground of close combat and ensures his success on that ground. This spirit is what makes the Infantryman uniquely qualified to accomplish his mission. Although this quality is intangible, we can best define the essence of Infantry by discussing the concepts and attributes that have always determined the Infantryman's success in the close fight.

It is the Infantryman's responsibility for this close personal combat that distinguishes his units from those of the other members of the combined arms team. The outcome of nearly every land battle has been decided by warriors who have met in close combat, and the essence of Infantry is found in those warriors and in their units. It is found in the individual and collective attributes that Infantrymen and Infantry units have always cherished—the initiative, discipline, competence, and courage of the individual soldiers; the tenacity, resourcefulness, and innovation of their leaders; and the versatility, cohesiveness, and ability of their units.

These qualities, although desirable in all soldiers, are fundamental to the Infantry; in fact, the close, personal nature of the Infantryman's fight makes them essential to his survival. The essence of Infantry motivates and inspires the Infantryman to risk death to ensure the safety of his comrades, the survival of his unit, and the accomplishment of his unit's mission.

This is not to say, of course, that the close fight is the Infantryman's exclusive domain. To succeed on today's battlefield, the Infantry will fight alongside the other members of the combined arms team. While the soldiers in these other units will also have to be competent and courageous, few will endure the same discomforts, pain, and horror of battle that the Infantryman will endure. This is true even in training, because the Infantryman's training must, by necessity, be tough, painful, and continuous.

If we as leaders understand the importance of these indi-

vidual and unit attributes, our priority must be to instill them in every Infantryman and every Infantry unit throughout the Army. We must realize that the fighting capability of every Infantry formation flows from the individual soldiers in it. We must therefore develop in our soldiers the confident belief that they constitute the most capable weapon on the battlefield. Whether the U.S. Army Infantryman walks, rides, flies, or jumps into the close fight, once he gets there he must feel that he owns the ground.

The essence of Infantry must be the focus of every Infantryman's training program. That training must emphasize, especially, the importance of physical fitness and marksmanship, and these areas should be integrated into every training event. In addition, since the night has always been the Infantryman's ally in battle, once he has mastered the essential combat tasks in the daytime, he must also master them at night. This is especially true of night live fire training.

To be successful, training events and exercises must require unit leaders to use their initiative and think on their feet. Situational training exercises must be developed that support independent action, and the training environment must be realistic and stressful. The training must challenge our soldiers to master all the Infantry tasks, individual and collective, and it must constantly remind them of their mission, their heritage, and the physical and mental toughness that is required of them.

Our squads and platoons must be trained to fight through the enemy at the lowest echelon with the weapons immediately available. By fighting in this manner, they retain the initiative and prevent the enemy from reacting effectively. Infantry squad and platoon combat drills, which link individual proficiency to unit success in battle, are designed to enable a unit to save precious seconds on the battlefield and to seize the initiative quickly through decisive, aggressive action.

These drills also provide an excellent vehicle for developing teamwork and cohesion, and it is at the small unit level that the fighting capability of a unit benefits most from this kind of cohesion. Few soldiers will be expected to fight

alone; most will fight as members of capable and cohesive squads and platoons. And from their fellow soldiers, they will gain the trust and confidence they need, not just to occupy ground but to dominate it.

This cohesion must also extend upward through the chain of command. Our Infantrymen cannot merely be sent into battle; they must be led into battle by one of their own, a leader they respect and trust. This means our Infantry leaders—especially those at squad, platoon, and company level—must be trained, resourceful warriors who understand how to fight their units effectively on the basis of their mission, their situation, and their commander's intent.

An effective unit leader training program must begin with the identification and selection of the best soldiers to become team and squad leaders. Our Infantry leaders, as the combined arms team integrators that are closest to the fight, must be the most skillful soldiers, expert at employing all of the supporting arms.

Because of the lethality of the modern battlefield, our squads and platoons must be able to operate independently. Accordingly, commanders must be confident enough in their units to allow decentralized operations. They must also be able to develop their concepts and articulate unit missions in ways that fully support the exercise of initiative. If we expect our subordinates to display initiative in battle, we must allow them to practice it in training.

Our doctrinal manuals are an important part of maintaining the readiness of our Infantry units, but the essence of Infantry is not found in a book. It is found in the leaders and soldiers of our Infantry units. It is developed and shared by these men in the heat and the dust at the National Training Center, in the forests at the Joint Readiness Training Center, and at the countless other locations where Infantry units train. Finally, it is evident in the only place it has ever counted—on the battlefield where U.S. Infantrymen must fight to accomplish their mission.

How can we tell when our Infantrymen and our Infantry units have this warrior spirit? How do we measure the intensity of this spirit within their hearts and minds? These are questions that every leader must answer before he leads his men into the fight.

How did the company commander in the lead aircraft carrying the 75th Ranger Regiment know, as it approached the drop zone at Rio Hato in the dark, that his men were ready for whatever awaited them on the ground? How did the squad leader in the 193d Infantry Brigade know, as he and his squad moved out shortly before H-Hour, that he had prepared his men for the mission at hand? Or—an even more crucial question—How did the soldiers in these or any of the other units that participated in the recent action in Panama know they were ready to fight and win?

Each leader knew because he had already found the answer during his unit's training in preparation for combat. He knew because he had spent countless hours observing and evaluating his men in training. He knew because he had seen it in the faces of his men at the end of the last field training exercise. He knew from the results of his

unit's last weapons qualification. He knew because of his trust and confidence in his soldiers. Each of the soldier knew the unit was ready for the same reasons, but also because he knew that his buddies were going to be there too and that he could depend on them just as they could depend on him.

Victory on the field of mortal combat is paid for in advance during many days and nights on the training field. The courage, confidence, and trust required to enter this fight also began there.

The most recent example of Infantrymen who have this warrior spirit came after the 3d Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment's airborne assault onto the Torrijos airport. The two Rangers involved were members of a fire team assigned to clear part of the airport terminal. The team leader was shot and wounded in a small room by two soldiers of the Panama Defense Force (PDF). These two Rangers immediately evacuated their wounded leader from the room, one of them receiving two rounds in his helmet.

While one Ranger tended to his buddy's wounds, the other started back to the room to clear it of enemy soldiers. After trying to kill the enemy with two hand grenades, this same Ranger again entered the room. After shooting one PDF soldier at close range and pushing him out a window, he engaged the other soldier in hand-to-hand combat. The second Ranger, after treating his team leader's wound, also reentered the room and with well-aimed fire killed the PDF soldier who was engaged in hand-to-hand combat with his buddy.

The courage, skill, and tenacity these two men displayed epitomized those individual warrior attributes. Their teamwork, cohesion, and concern for their fallen Ranger are remarkable examples of the collective attributes that all Infantry units must possess if they are to fight and win.

These Infantrymen and countless others involved in Operation Just Cause demonstrated the essence of Infantry. They paid the price to ensure that when called upon to enter the fight they would not be found lacking.

This, then, is our challenge for the future. Every Infantryman in the force must exemplify the attributes I have discussed. All Infantry units must display the warrior spirit in their tactical operations. They must maneuver aggressively, using stealth and the terrain to get to the enemy's weak points. Their tactics must be oriented on the offense in all situations. Even in the defense, they must routinely ambush, attack, and counterattack.

Our Infantry units must capitalize on the strengths of their tough and spirited soldiers to seek out and destroy the enemy on his terrain using initiative, stealth, and surprise. These tactics require the highest degree of tactical excellence. An Infantry unit's ability to operate during periods of limited visibility and to use its camouflage skills properly are combat multipliers; its tactics must exploit.

Above all, these operations must be conducted by resourceful leaders, capable of independent action, who fully understand how to apply the combat power inherent in their units.